Deeps: oldies but goldies

NEW YORK: Musicians may come and go but Deep Purple still command a huge following in New York. The situation with Purple is almost approaching that of the various black vocal groups whose permanently alternating personnel casts doubts on their authenticity. Unlikely as the prospect may be, what's to stop Ritchie Blackmore teaming up with some other ex-Purples and touring as Deep Purple too?

Just a passing thought, but pertinent nevertheless because the latest assembly of Purples not only hang on to the style of previous bands but also put a great emphasis on numbers like "Smoke On The Water," "Lazy" and "Highway Star," all songs from their past. And it must be stated that the audience certainly perks up whenever these tracks are aired.

The one exception to this is the presence of Glen Hughes, the bass player, who possesses a quite remarkable voice. His singing throughout last Friday's concert at the Radio City Music Hall easily overshadowed that of singer David Coverdale, who spent more time off-stage than on.

Tommy Bolin, Blackmore's American replacement, is a good, flashy player capable of all the licks, but who has yet to stamp out an identity of his own. While Blackmore had a style that left you in no doubt as to who was playing, Bolin, with all his energy, sounds pretty much like any other hard rock riffer treading the boards. Perhaps it's still early days.

And the band? Well they played too damn loud for comfort and these thoughts were echoed by a good percentage of the crowd who spent various periods of the concert in the large Radio City lobby, apparently seeking relief from the volume before returning to the inferno.

Soloing has always been Purple's strongest point, even back to Glover-Gillan days, and the new band keeps up the tradition. Lord's intro on "Lazy" was both inventive and light-hearted, meandering through Phantom of the Opera chords to carousel tinkling, while Ian Paice's drum bash during the same number has lost none of its fire and enthusiasm.

Nazareth, sticking to the well-tried formula of energy over progression, opened the show. They're an efficient, tight little rock band but so are so many others of their ilk. Manny Charlton's slide guitar work is their best feature. — CHRIS CHARLESWORTH.

COMMANDER CODY

COMMANDER Cody's concert last Sunday at London's Hammersmith Odeon was, I believe, recorded for possible release. I hope most sincerely that it was recorded, because it could make for one hell of an album.

Cody and His Lost Planet Airmen had not played in this country for two years, but their reputation for being amongst America's finest contemporary exponents of country music and (in the Commander's words) "boogiewoogietruckdrivingwesternswing" ensured them of a capacity audience eager to get down with it and — to use another of Cody's colourful expressions — "boogie like motherf——ers."

Resembling the debauched remnants of a particularly vivid Hunter Thompson cowboy phantasy, Cody and his lunatic ensemble breezed through an exhaustive repertoire of musical styles with consummate authority and freewheeling zeal, with the fiddle of Andy Stein and the pedal steel of Bobby Black always outstanding.

Their act is far more than an authentic re-creation of various strains of country, and although their affection for the music is obviously genuine, they invest each piece with infectious humour. With the leading roles divided between Billy C. Farlow, guitarist Bill Kirchen, Cody — whose piano playing was a constant joy — and new member Norton Buffalo, they seemed endlessly versatile.

Trucking favourites like "I Took Three Bennies And My Semi-Truck Won't Start" and "Looking At The World Through A Windshield" gave way to impressive Western Swing classics such as "Rose Of San Antonio" (which featured the delightful Ozone Brass), and tear-jerkers like "Mama Hated Diesels."

The final half hour of the performance bordered on anarchic chaos, with reckless, boogie interpretations of "Don't Let Go" and "Too Much Fun" and a hilarious, epic version of "Hot Rod Lincoln" which segued into the irresistible "Lost In The Ozone Again." They encored, finally, with a selection of acappella variations on a theme from Bo Diddley, which was truly inspired.

Gig of the month, at the very least. — ALLAN JONES.

DICK MORRISSEY

WOULD THAT Dick Morrissey were not so popular. Not to mention Mike Carr, Terry Smith and Bobby Gein. For this exhilerating combination of talent is guaranteed to so pack out the Bulls Head, Barnes, there is barely room to place a foot on the floor.

Mike kept his Hammond organ surprisingly quiet, which was a wise move in such a small room, and indeed Gein frequently laid out altogether, which gave Terry Smith a chance to build up remarkable tension with superb guitar artistry.

His technique has always been admired, but apart from his speed, Terry is a vastly entertaining player because he has a genuine feel for the blues, and a highly developed sense of tone and dynamics. Smith is one of the finest guitar players Britain has produced, but remains woefully underrated. Not so on this night, however, for the Bull signalled its approval and delight, by listening attentively and clapping as ferociously as juggling beermugs and close proximity of one's neighbours allowed.

Dick Morrissey has long been a man who can be relied on to deliver the musical goods. There is a sense of "rightness," and joy about his playing that is found in only a few musicians and Dick is always consistently on form, capable of exciting himself as much as the audience.

His tenor bubbles and caresses the notes, then digs in with volatile, explosive force. Like Terry, he is a master at building tension and piling on ideas. With such veritable giants in the front line, it is therefore an added bonus to have Mike Carr's unpretentious, driving organ behind them, developing enough energy to be an entire group on its own. But Carr can be restrained too, and the use of electric piano, which is less dynamically aggressive than the organ, helped add colour, particularly to passages where Dick played flute.

Tempos ranged from ultra fast to Les McCann's "Something Special," to laid back and funky rock and Latin beats, where Bobby Gein displayed his versatility and enthusiasm. Bobby still gets tense at times, and like many drummers, plays better as the evening wears on and he gets sufficiently tired to loosen up and relax. Midway through the set he was cooking. But it would be difficult to remain unmoved by the emotion-charged, storming blowing of Messrs Carr, Morrissey & Smith.

All are advised to dash post haste to the Bull to catch this combination in their present state of incandescence, but let's hope they knock down a wall or two before the next gig. — CHRIS WELCH.

ALAN STIVELL

WHEN Alan Stivell initially swept through Britain in 1973, he was irresistible. But watching the latest Stivell band's debut at London's Royal Albert Hall last week, the joy turned sour. Even with a total ignorance of the Breton language, there's no missing the heavy political overtones that permeate much of his work and are threatening to overwhelm it; and while the music was excellent, it lacked the exhilaration of previous concerts.

There was, indeed, dancing in the aisles, just like before, but you could almost see the dancers crouching in their seats, ready to spring into action once the band had opened up. The whole structure of the concert appeared to be geared to this inevitable end; in a way so calculated and mechanical as to weaken the essential spirit of Celtic music that has lifted Stivell to his current height.

"Ian Morrisson Reel," with Stivell turning to bagpipes, was as rousing as ever, yet its strategic positioning at the opening of the second half, following the usual peaceful opening set, seemed another part of The Formula.

The first half, though ragged, provided the best moments. Without accompaniment, Stivell's harp-playing continues to be a regal performance, while Dan Ar Bras provided a delightful acoustic guitar solo. Much interest surrounded the temporary introduction into the band of Dave Swarbrick, but Swarb — fag in mouth throughout — quite understandably hadn't yet moulded himself into the band.

There were fleeting moments of the magic as bombardes and chanteurs were brought into the fray, but Stivell was below his best, vocally, and the whole thing didn't even have the advantage of being a tight unit.— COLIN IRWIN.

RZEWSKI/CARDEW

"BEWARE of curs lurking outside when you are feeling drowsy . . . head high, I militantly walk to the execution grounds." Soprano vocalist Jane Manning wails these lines at the tail-end of a concert called "Music Of Resistance," masterminded by that avant gardist turned Maoist, Cornelius Cardew.

Though Cardew's intentions are paramountly sincere, to an apolitical animal like myself he comes across as a joke figure, a kind of cartoon revolutionary. His sweeping texts burgeon with references to the bourgeoisie, the capitalist system and fascism, and inept translations of Yin Cheng-tsung's "The Red Lantern" really don't aid his cause at all.

Still, it was only this closing sequence of the concert, at the St Pancras Assembly Rooms, London, last week, that degenerated into verbal farce, and even then, if one could have detached narrative from musical matter, it could have been enjoyable in a jolly fashion of East meets West way: Cornelius hitting sticks together, free musicians Evan Parker and Paul Rutherford banging little Oriental gongs (Balinese perhaps?), and Frederic Rzewski, erstwhile guiding light of Musica Elletronica Viva, on strident piano.

Rzewski, in fact, was the star of the show, although it was scarcely possible to judge the contributions of Parker and Rutherford on their native instruments — soprano sax and trombone respectively — restricted as they were to technically demanding, though aurally unimpressive, parts.

Best number of the evening was Rzewski's "Coming Together/Attica," an amalgam of compositions for speaker and variable instrumental ensemble based on a letter from one Sam Melville, an Attica inmate. Here Cardew was convincing as a kind of stand-up vocalist performing an English variation (mild-mannered) of the Last poets' declamatory style.

The music, meanwhile, a single continuous melodic line built of seven pitches, revealed a syncopation that was quite close to jazz, with Laurie Baker's bass guitar cheerfully displacing accents.

Lyric content aside (and Cardew would probably argue that this was the most important facet), the entire concert was remarkably accessible and free of the brow-furrowing that accompanies many such events. But one does worry about the viability of playing Music Of Resistance to the same old avant garde clique. Take it to the proletariat, Cornelius. Play the Reading Pop Festival. — STEVE LAKE

MOSE ALLISON

LOS ANGELES: In a music world which seems to be continually in a state of turmoil, Mose Allison is one of the few staples. Last week at the Lighthouse in Hermosa Beach, he did precisely what he has done for the past 15 years, in clubs and on a couple of dozen albums: he played piano with a vigorous, jogging beat and sang in a down-home country style that calls up images of his origin in the small town of Tippo, Mississippi.

As a white musician who sings old style blues but plays relatively modern piano, Allison has been a maverick, always difficult to categorize but never hard to accept on his own terms. He opened his set with two instrumentals. The first was "You Won't Let Me Go," that venerable blues-like ballad, to which he appended a humorous, kaleidoscopically changing riff.

"Old Devil Moon" was embellished with tricky, provocative dissonances in which Allison's left hand supplied fascinating countermelodies and cross rhythms. The tune ended oddly with long solos by Pat Senatore on bass and John Dense on drums.

Allison's vocal numbers (most of the songs were his own) reflected a homespun philosophy laced with sophistication. Some of his perennial hits, such as "Seventh Son," "Parchman Farm," "Everybody's Crying Mercy," and "Your Mind Is On Vacation (And Your Mouth Is Working Overtime)" have worn well over the years.

Allison would be lost in a concert hall; his low key, intimate style is perfectly attuned to a small room. His diction is unfashionably clear.

Although he has made a couple of trips to Europe and has played Ronnie Scott's, Mose Allison has never achieved the international recognition he deserves. (Surprisingly, he has not even worked in Japan). Now 48, he delivers his unique messages in a style you might associate with grandpa telling the kiddies about life. The simple honesty of his story telling, and growing complexity of his keyboard work, makes for a fascinating paradox. — LEONARD FEATHER.

DEEP PURPLE: too loud

Caught in the Act

ANTHONY BRAXTON

NEW YORK: Saxist Anthony Braxton has solid avant garde credentials: Chicago free jazz school; 1973 French Jazz Oscar; big in Japan; Melody Maker "deserves wider recognition" award.

But his recent Bottom Line appearance was a move above ground, like his first album on the Arista label, and it provided a fine test of the current, "Give-the-lads-a-hearing-and-acceptance-will-be-theirs" theory, especially since the Bottom Line caters to a young public that takes popular music seriously. Moreover, Braxton's quartet appeared after a young conservatory quartet playing work by Oliver Messiaens, which gave him two distinct experimental audiences — jazz and "straight." Ideal for a jazzman whose influences include Cage and Xenakis.

But one half of this ideal audience, which had been rapt throughout Messiaens, melted away by the end of Braxton's set.

Whenever he permits himself, Braxton plays fine alto, and he has a sense of what came before him as well as the urge to make things new. When, too late, the group went into a classic postbop number, he delivered a series of solos that really did move on up, and out, a little higher. But the set as a whole was a disaster of random phrase-making, bumblings on deservedly obscure instruments, and references to the less valuable features of contemporary conservatory music.

I believe free jazz as a whole suffers from a confusion between liberty of form and liberty of content, and certainly an absence of structure constricted Braxton mightily. But I also sensed a far graver problem. For all their self-imposed incoherence, players like Archie Shepp and Ornette Coleman deal in the basics of all art: human emotion.

Braxton marches resolutely into the same dead end as his conservatory counterparts: a dryly academic obsession with the externals of avant-gardism that is truly decadent.

The contrast with a truly important contemporary, Keith Jarrett, is striking.

Not only does Jarrett play with a heart — soul if you like — that Braxton lacks; but where Braxton flirts with Europe, Jarrett relates to a wide range of earlier black styles.

The more music I hear, the more I'm convinced that true progress demands a strong sense of roots. Braxton may have that, but he isn't using it. While his talent and dedication are undeniable, he absolutely has to — I've been judicious long enough — stop Messiaen about . . . . — JOHN STORM ROBERTS

PAWS FOR THOUGHT

THE Royal Northern College of Music is a prestigious venue, encompassing full-scale opera, concert and recital halls, and many practice rooms.

A capacity of around 600 isn't very often achieved, but Paws for Thought attracted a large enough audience last week and a glance at the programme showed that a broad spectrum of taste was being attempted. They are a guitar trio, and unusual in employing a mixture of electric, bass and classical guitar.

Kenny Shaw, on electric, is becoming accepted as a player of some stature through his work with Nucleus; Richard Wright is a graduate of the college and an in-demand classical guitarist with a very broad repertoire. The remaining member, Paul Mitchell-Davidson, was bassist with jazz-rock outfit Monad, and he teaches and plays extensively in Manchester. The trio met at a performance of a Penderescki concerto and have been developing a repertoire since June 1975.

Opening with a Davidson composition, "The Razor's Edge," they immediately displayed all their strengths and weaknesses; in ensemble passages it was evident that the guitarists had to rely a great deal on the nimble-fingered Davidson for cues.

In the central, improvised section, however, Kenny Shaw managed to generate a considerable amount of feel, although poor sound balance reduced the classical instrument to the role of rhythm guitar strumming. The subsequent piece, "Rondo," written for guitar trio by Hindemith in 1925, showed that articulation and agility could gell with the unusual instrumentation to produce a stately and remarkable sound picture.

As a demonstration of taste in assembling a programme, and skill in execution of an unusual idiom, Paws for Thought must consider the evening an only slightly qualified success. At no time did the standard of musicianship fall below excellence, and in ranging over three centuries of music, from Bach to Bartok and beyond, they showed great skill; and even courage. — MARTIN HANNETT

GRYPHON

I CAN'T quite see the point of having such instruments as crumhorns and recorders in a rock band, especially when they are drowned by the unremitting thumping of two hefty drum kits. There doesn't seem an awful lot of sense in retaining a medieval image, either, when electric guitars and synthesizers are the main features of the band.

Somehow, medieval music doesn't sound quite the same crashed out with two drums and heavy bass in the background. If this band were seen for the first time, they would seem a competent rock band with average chance of success, but as Gryphon they bear no resemblance to the group of sensitive and talented musicians to be found less than a year ago in moderate venues here and on the Continent. They have three new members: a new bassist and guitarist to replace Malcom Bennett and Grahame Taylor, and an extra drummer.

From the beginning of their set at London's Marquee last week they crashed and mutilated their way through the excellent songs from their previous albums, with a brief respite for a few semi-acoustic renderings. Here, Richard Harvey's ability with a recorder and some more delicate guitar work could be appreciated.

For the rest, their performance only came to life when they did tracks such as "Wall-banger" from their latest album, "Raindance," which unlike the early albums, has little pretension towards being a form of historic English music. — LIZZY BEALE

Angel captured

NEW YORK: California produces singer-songwriters by the score. Guitar-toting troubadors emerge from the canyons with songs about love and the environment and however many materialise, they never seem to satisfy the constant demand for this type of artist and this particular brand of music.

Dan Fogelberg is no exception. A quiet, retiring sort of fellow who looks rather like Mike Oldfield, he does not give interviews and little is known about him other than that he comes from Tennessee, sells records by the million and now lives in Los Angeles where he is managed by the same company as the Eagles.

Indeed, Fogelberg's band, Fools Gold, are remarkably like the Eagles although not quite as proficient. They opened the show for him at New York's Avery Fisher Hall on Wednesday, passing the time with simple country rock music and tasteful vocal harmony, none of which was in the slightest way original but which was lapped up by a drooling, sell-out crowd.

Fogelberg split his own portion of the show into two. First he appeared solo and, after a second short break, returned with Fools Gold. His appeal appears to be towards romantically inclined girls in much the same fashion as Cat Stevens, although his songs are far gutsier.

He is a fine guitar picker, and excelled during a classically-inspired instrumental piece with a Mexican sounding title as well as some complex acoustic solos that made full use of the harmonics at the 12th fret.

Switching to electric guitar when the band re-appeared, much of the concert's intimacy disappeared in the welter of country flavoured songs driven along by Doug Livingston's pedal steel guitar. I preferred the artist solo, but this view wasn't shared by the rest of the audience who took the cue to scramble to the front as the energy, albeit controlled, began to flow.

Fogelberg possesses huge amounts of commercial talent. Though the lyrics are occasionally a trifle banal, his melodies, especially the more intricate ones, are quite fine and his instrumental training — he plays the piano too — is very sound. Yet another Jackson Browne in our midst. — CHRIS CHARLESWORTH.

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